

responded to a 'pishing' call made by Poll and flew up to an exposed branch of a gular (*Ficus glomerata*), where it remained clearly visible for about two minutes. Description from my notes is: "Olive brown above, no wing-bars. Buff eye-ring. Brown scaly marks on underparts but not on lower abdomen. Unmarked stripe of dirty white down chin. Bill brown, yellowish at base." All three of us agreed on this description. This corresponds with the description by Ali and Ripley for *Zoothera mollissima*. Unfortunately, we were unable to see it well enough in flight to note the prominent wing-patch. I saw this bird again on 6 February 1989 in a kasai tree (*Bridelia retusa*) in a mixed forest close to where I had seen it the last time.

Bandhavgarh is well outside the range ascribed by Ali and Ripley to either the western (*Z. m. whiteheadi*) or the eastern (*Z. m. mollissima*) races. However, I am reasonably certain that this is *Zoothera mollissima*, although it must be noted that the habitat that I saw it in was somewhat different in every instance to that described for the eastern race by Ali and Ripley which, to quote, "In winter affects open bush country about fallow cultivation on hill-sides and stream valleys, and along mule paths." If this is a correct identification than it would indicate that *Zoothera mollissima* is a regular visitor to Bandhavgarh in small numbers.

August 4, 1989

HASHIM N. TYABJI

18. FLIES FORMING A POSSIBLE FOOD SUPPLY FOR YOUNG HOUSE SPARROWS *PASSER DOMESTICUS* (LINN.)

On 18 February 1989 at Jhansi, Uttar Pradesh, I was sitting in a room that was crawling with flies, with scores of them flying around the glass panes of the windows.

After some time I noticed that a male and female house sparrow *Passer domesticus* were entering the room alternately and heading straight for the window to pick off the flies there. This they did by alighting on the window sill and hopping about or fluttering into the air after the flies, occasionally indulging in highly acrobatic chases of individual insects. After catching a gullet-full, they would fly off.

On two occasions I managed to make an accurate count of the number of flies taken – both times by the male – and they were 6 and 8. I could

not get an accurate count for the female.

Since all the doors and windows were closed, the birds were entering and exiting by squeezing through the gap between one of the doors and the floor. They were flying a regular relay route, with the longest gap without either bird in the room being about 2 minutes.

Presumably the birds were parents catching the flies to feed their young, although I could not locate the nest. But it was interesting to see how the birds had located a rich source of food which they managed to exploit in spite of closed doors and windows. I had neither earlier seen, nor read about, sparrows taking flies.

August 4, 1989

HASHIM N. TYABJI

19. NESTS OF BAYA WEAVER BIRDS *PLOCEUS PHILIPPINUS* AND WINTERING ARTHROPODS

A large number of completed and half built nests of baya weaver birds *Ploceus philippinus* were collected from October 1988 to March 1989 from many localities in Alwar district, Rajasthan, to study the arthropods, which winter in these nests. Various types of spiders and insects were collected from the nests, as detailed below.

Spiders – *Plexippus paykullii* (Family Salticidae), *Marpissa* spp. (Family Salticidae),

Sparassus spp. (Family Sparassidae), *Scytodes* spp. (Family Scytodidae). Bugs – *Dysdercus cingulatus* (Family Pyrrhocoridae).

Many spiders were seen with eggs and spiderlings with them. Many nests contained more than one type of spider. Bugs and spiders were sometimes seen together in the same nest.

All the collected nests were scrutinised and it was found that the nest ceiling is the most preferred